

Loser, by Jerry Spinelli
HarperCollins, 2002, 224 pp., \$15.99

Self-Acceptance/Family Life
ISBN: 0-06-000193-3

Loser tells the story of Zinkoff, a lovable “loser” who is neither smart enough to recognize when his exuberant behavior is inappropriate, nor competitive or worldly enough to care.

Despite the teasing of his peers, Zinkoff’s main goals are to have fun, explore his surroundings, and see the best in others. This is what makes *Loser* such a wonderful read: it celebrates the child in all of us, while at the same time it points out the problems inherent in growing up.

Fortunately, Zinkoff is not alone in making his journey: his sister Polly, his 1st and 4th grade teachers, and a heroic snowplow driver all support him. His mother and father do too, which is important because there are plenty of bullies unable to appreciate what Zinkoff has to offer.

Fans of Spinelli’s work will enjoy this vivid and poignant, though not especially dramatic, coming-of-age tale (please do note that Zinkoff is only in 6th grade when this narrative ends). I recommend it as an excellent read-aloud, and catalyst for discussion of social and ethical issues. And as usual, Spinelli delivers.

Tom Phillion
Chicago, IL

With Their Eyes, edited by Annie Thoms
HarperTempest, 2002, 228 pp., \$17.89

September 11/Oral History
ISBN: 0-06-051806-5

New York City’s Stuyvesant High School was on the front lines the morning of September 11, 2001. As faculty and students watched, the nearby Twin Towers tumbled into dust. Relocated while their school was used for the rescue mission, the students in Annie Thoms’s English class tried to decipher the event’s effect on their school community.

Fitted with tape recorders, the students sought out students, faculty and staff and interviewed them about their experiences on and after September 11. They transcribed each interview, selecting twenty-five to turn into a two-act play, with students portraying their interviewees through dress, gesture and speech patterns. The play was performed on February 8 and 9, 2002, at Stuyvesant High.

Thoms’s students have created a unique art form, part oral history, part drama, that depicts the wide range of emotions and reactions experienced by those in the inner rings of ground zero. This text can be a resource for producing the play, but also for other teachers to use in constructing a multigenre project. Powerful and poignant, *With Their Eyes* is testament to the power of writing.

Michele Winship
Columbus, OH

Stand Tall by Joan Bauer
G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2002, 192 pp., \$16.99

Contemporary Fiction
ISBN 0-399-23473-X

At six feet three inches tall, twelve year-old “Tree” is a middle school giant. Thus far, this has proven to be a source of trouble, criticism and teasing. Now, he is slowly realizing the strength he can obtain in his size throughout the events of the story.

Along with his disabled Veteran grandfather, unpopular best friend, and newly divorced parents, Tree is learning how to struggle through “war” without losing hope. Though the situation seems unbearable, Tree and the others look to each other for support.

When things seem like they just might work out, the entire town is struck with the devastation of an unexpected flood. This forces the community and Tree’s family to unite in making it through the flood and rebuilding. Through these and other events, Tree is slowly learning how to stand tall amidst difficulties, using his height as a strength. In that journey, we learn how to maintain hope against all odds.

Katie Marshall
Redford, MI

Young Adult Books In Review Recently Published Titles

Jeff Kaplan, Editor

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REVIEW

<p><i>Fire-us Trilogy: 5 Book 1: The Kindling</i> by Jennifer Armstrong and Nancy Butcher HarperCollins Children's Books, 2002, 224 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>The authors imagine what life would be like in the adult-less environment of Lazarus, Florida, after the Fire-us virus has killed the adults in 2002. Set five years later, the book reveals how a group of young adults and children have survived. They have taken on new names because their memories of the before time no longer exist. Mommy, Hunter, Teacher, Action Figure, Teddy Bear, Baby, and Doll don't live "happily ever after," but in a <i>Lord of the Flies</i> setting, functioning with anxiety.</p> <p>Enter Anchorman, who becomes Angerman, and his mannequin Bad Guy, who intends to go to Washington to find the President. Two wild kids emerge, Kitty and Puppy. The group sets off with the goal of the Capitol. On page 223, "kindling is lit," and the book ends, as do many chapters, with a tease to read what follows. The story is drawn out and demands patience. Although the authors have enviable credentials, they seem to have designed a pattern that demands tighter control than they are willing to maintain in this book. The reading is an arduous path to discussing the possibilities the book presents.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Len DeAngelis Newport, RI</p>	<p><i>Big Bang: The Loud Debate Over Gun Control</i> by Norman L. Lunger Twenty First Century Books, 2002, 160 pp., \$25.90</p> <p>Contemporary Issues ISBN 0-7613-2260-4</p> <p>One of a series of books on contemporary topics of interest, this is an excellent one which thoroughly examines both sides of the gun control issue for young adults age 12 and up. Useful information is presented, including the history of gun use from frontier times to the present in the United States, and an explanation of our constitutional right to bear arms. The author also discusses the legal issues surrounding this right, and tracks the development of gun control legislation that has both been proposed and passed into law. A comparison of gun control laws in other countries, such as Great Britain, Japan, Canada, and Brazil, is provided so readers can judge the influence of culture on such legal traditions.</p> <p>Gun safety education is emphasized and positions for and against gun control are fairly argued and supported with documented detail. This book has an excellent set of source notes for each chapter, plus suggested additional readings.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Edgar H. Thompson Emory, VA</p>
<p><i>Boston Jane: Wilderness Days</i> by Jennifer L. Holm HarperCollins, 2002, 242 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Historical fiction/Adventure ISBN: 0-06-029043-9</p> <p>Fiesty Jane Peck is determined to return to her native Philadelphia from the remote settlement of Washington's Shoalwater Bay. But her loyalty to the settlers and the Native American community and her growing passion for a sailor keep her from leaving.</p> <p>The second in the <i>Boston Jane</i> trilogy exposes readers to an early American reality: the harsh wilderness can become a home, complete with neighbors and friendship. Simple living surpasses city life when one's community is welcoming. Though Jane often complains about the living conditions, she takes pride in her ability to sew shirts and bake homemade pies. At 16, she runs an oyster business and exhibits bravery in several dangerous situations.</p> <p>This quick, fun read includes an author's note that places the context in history. Jane Peck is an admirable, though perhaps not totally plausible, heroine. It's a terrific book for 10-12 year olds.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lisa K. Winkler South Orange, NJ</p>	<p><i>Breaking Point</i> by Alex Flinn HarperTempest, 2002, 241 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Peer Pressure ISBN: 0-06-0623847-1</p> <p>When you are a new student, sometimes making friends is difficult. Perhaps that is the reason why Paul jumps at the chance to join Charley Good's inner circle of friends. Initiation seems simple enough at the outset: the pranks the group of friends play are harmless at first. And Paul is a willing accomplice. Eventually, though, what Charley expects from his new friend is beyond what Paul feels comfortable doing. How far will Paul go to maintain this relationship?</p> <p>Flinn has already demonstrated to readers that she is willing to explore the dark side of the human condition. <i>Breathing Underwater</i>, her debut novel, examined the inner turmoil of a young man who has physically abused his girlfriend. Here Flinn again turns an unflinching eye to the price one is willing to pay to fit in, to belong, to be popular.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Teri S. Lesesne Huntsville, TX</p>

<p><i>Handbook for Boys: A Novel</i> by Walter Dean Myers HarperCollins Publishers, 2002, 179 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Conduct of Life ISBN: 0-06-029146-X</p> <p>When Jimmy and Kevin find themselves before the judge, they are willing to do anything rather than go to a youth facility, even work every day at Duke's Barbershop in Harlem. Jimmy, though, didn't know this community mentor program would mean he had to listen to the ramblings of the men who gathered each day at Duke's, even if they weren't getting a hair cut.</p> <p>Soon Jimmy realizes the talk isn't idle reminiscing of senile men, but lessons for a successful life. Too bad they haven't been written in a handbook. Kevin seems to need one. And above all, Jimmy hopes his friend can stay out of more trouble as Jimmy himself hopes to do, but it doesn't seem that Kevin will make the right choices.</p> <p>The lessons in this novel are excellent, and teachers should be aware of the tastefully handled, but mature themes used in presenting the message.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lu Ann Brobst Staheli Spanish Fork, UT</p>	<p><i>Hoot</i> by Carl Hiaasen Alfred A. Knopf, 2002, 292 pp., \$ 15.95</p> <p>Realistic Fiction/Adventure ISBN: 0-375-82181-3</p> <p>Roy Eberhardt's most recent move has taken him from the mountains of Montana to the flatlands of Florida. "Disney World is an armpit," he states unhappily, "compared to Montana."</p> <p>On the first day of school, he meets Dana Matherson... rather he meets Dana's fist during a bus ride brawl. While pressed against the school bus window, Roy spots a running boy. This boy is carrying no backpack, and oddly enough, is wearing no shoes! Desperate to find some action in Florida, Roy trails the barefoot runner.</p> <p>As a friendship with the mysterious boy develops, Roy becomes involved in an attempt to save a colony of burrowing owls from the construction of the new "Mother Paula's All-American Pancake House."</p> <p>In his telling of Roy's story, popular author Carl Hiassen creates a character who is not only believable, but extremely likeable. The story is told in a way that gives the reader insight into Roy's thoughts, actions, and rationale. Hiassen captures our interest as he manages to show how young Roy can be obedient, caring, and unconventional – all at the same time.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lindsey L. Webster Wheaton, IL</p>
<p><i>Surviving the Applewhites</i>, by Stephanie Tolan HarperCollins, 2002, 216 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Family Life/Individuality ISBN: 0-06-623603-7</p> <p>Individuality is important to Jake Semple. He is a juvenile delinquent who sports an eyebrow ring, spiked and garish red hair, black clothes, numerous earrings—anything it takes to be noticed. In a final attempt to rehabilitate him, Jake is sent to the Applewhites, a quirky, artistic family whose many interests include butterflies, goats, dogs, and theater. Before long, Jake is immersed in the family's lives and projects. Soon, Jake no longer feels a need to make a statement with his appearance, since no one really cares about how he looks. He only wants to find his true self.</p> <p>The Applewhites's sense of family, love of learning, and ability to accept people of all backgrounds send a strong yet subtle message. Readers will find this book appeals to them on many levels. It especially speaks to the rebel in all of us. This book will pique the interest of even the most reluctant reader.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Joy Frerichs Chatsworth, GA</p>	<p><i>Sorcerers of the Nightwing</i> by Geoffrey Huntington Regan Books/HarperCollins, 2002, 278 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Mystery/Suspense/Fantasy ISBN: 0-06-001425-3</p> <p>Devon March and his father appear perfectly normal, but are really Nightwings, members of an ancient group who use their powers of good to send escaped demons back to the Hellholes that contain them within.</p> <p>After his father's death, fourteen-year-old Devon discovers that he was adopted, and he possesses a special destiny as the Nightwing's hundredth-generation child. Moreover, he must now live with his chosen guardians, the mysterious and troubled Muir-Crandall family. Together, they reside in an isolated, haunted mansion named Ravenscliff. Also living at Ravenscliff is an Apostate, a Nightwing turned evil, who pursues Devon. Soon other Nightwings appear, and Devon begins a roller-coaster ride of thrilling, frightening adventures as he battles demons and investigates Ravenscliff's mysteries, and learns that all of them, including the menacing Apostate, are somehow tied to his own murky past and future.</p> <p>Mystery and fantasy fans, as well as reluctant readers, will find this novel difficult to put down. It ends with tantalizing unsolved mysteries, but as Book I in <i>The Ravenscliff Series</i>, this one sets up readers for its sequels.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lisa A. Hazlett Vermillion, SD</p>

<p><i>Dog of Discovery</i> by Laurence Pringle Boyd's Mill Press, 2002, 149 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>History/Adventure ISBN: 1-59078-028-0</p> <p>This informative book recounts the 1804-1806 Lewis and Clark expedition from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean and back. The book details the expedition's planning, its adventures and discoveries, and its aftermath, focusing especially on the exploits of Seaman, Meriweather Lewis's Newfoundland dog. Seaman was a faithful companion and guard dog as well as a hunter and retriever. He underwent the same hardships as the other members of the Corps of Discovery: insect bites, fatigue, hunger, Indian and grizzly attacks, to name a few.</p> <p>Information is presented in a non-threatening way, utilizing sidebars, maps, historical illustrations, as well as actual journal entries from Lewis and Clark. <i>Dog of Discovery</i> is an ideal entry into non-fiction for younger readers. Nature and animal lovers of all ages will enjoy it, and learn a great deal about this uniquely American adventure into the Wild West.</p> <p>Eileen Callery Shrub Oak, NY</p>	<p><i>Ruby Holler</i>, by Sharon Creech HarperCollins, 2002, 310 pp., \$16.99,</p> <p>Orphans/Adventure ISBN: 0-06027732-7</p> <p>This is a fast moving novel about an exceptional relationship between two older, adventuresome country souls named Tiller and Sairy Morey and twin orphans from the Boxton Creek Home for Children, Dallas and Florida Carter.</p> <p>The home, operated by Mr. and Mrs. Trepid, seems to be little more than a ramshackle parking place for the thirteen children who live there. The Trepids have mapped out a large number of spirit-numbing rules and regulations. However, as a character later points out, not everything is on maps.</p> <p>Tiller and Sairy Morey temporarily adopt the twins, and take them to Ruby Holler, a magical place named for the brilliant fall colors of the maple trees. The Moreys live like pioneers without modern conveniences, but with a respect for the land and a creative way of carving birds and boats out of wood chips.</p> <p>The spunky, lively twins are transformed by being softened up with good food and Tiller and Sairy's loving and gentle ways. They assist each other in adventures featuring physical challenges, treachery, and treasure maps. Recommended for young readers who love fantasy, adventure, and just plain whimsy.</p> <p>Tom MacLennan Wilmington, NC</p>
<p><i>The Big Burn</i> by Jeanette Ingold Harcourt, Inc., 2002, 295 pp., \$17.00</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Survival/Forest Fires ISBN: 0-15-216470-7</p> <p>In this fascinating, gripping adventure/survival story based on a 1910 fire in Idaho and Montana, author Jeanette Ingold skillfully intertwines the lives of three teenagers caught up in the fire. There is Seth, an insecure 17-year-old African-American soldier whose unit is called in to help fight the fire, escapes the pernicious influence of a "friend," and discovers that he, like his father, has a future in the army. And there is 16-year-old Jarrett, who loses his railroad job, leaves the home of his domineering father, and proves himself by successfully leading ill-trained fire crews, and who learns that a career in forestry is for him. Finally, there is 16-year-old Lizabeth and her widowed aunt, who are forced by the fire to abandon their homestead, but find equal danger in town.</p> <p>The romantic relationship between Jarrett and Lizabeth, as well as that between Jarrett's older brother and Lizabeth's aunt provide nice romantic touches. Nonfiction "field notes" interspersed throughout the story provide necessary background by chronicling the actual events of the fire. Additionally, the short chapters, which shift from one character to another, make for a lively, suspenseful read.</p> <p>Bill Mollineaux Granby, CT</p>	<p><i>Horse Thief</i>, by Robert Newton Peck HarperCollins Publishers, 2002, 231 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Rodeo/Coming of Age ISBN: 0-06-623791-2</p> <p>The horses and colorful characters of the rodeo become like family to the orphan Tullis Yoder, but it is not until he faces even more difficult times that he gains the family he has wanted for so long. After a tragic rodeo accident in 1938, Tullis spends time recovering with Doc Platt. Still mourning the deaths of her son and husband, Doc mothers Tullis back to health.</p> <p>The rodeo closes after another accident threatens its financial future, and the horses are to be sold to a dog food company. Tullis, Doc, and Doc's father face adventures and obstacles as they steal the horses and take them to safety.</p> <p>This book was difficult to read at times because the speaker changed in each chapter, and there were several storylines that only converged at the end of the book. This could be problematic for struggling readers. After the first few chapters, though, the book became easier to read and a pattern seemed to develop. Boys between the ages of 12-15 would be most likely to enjoy this book.</p> <p>Maryanne Obersinner Eugene, OR</p>

<p><i>Outside In</i>, by Karen Romano Young Greenwillow Books, 2002, 201 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Family/Friendship/The Sixties ISBN: 0-688-17363-2</p> <p>Soon to be 13, Cherie's world is changing too fast. She is delivering newspapers during a year when bad news appears to be the norm. It is the year of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy, as well as the events of the war in Vietnam and the ensuing riots here in the United States. More frightening to Cherie, though, is the news from a nearby town of the kidnapping of Wendy Boland. The young kidnapped girl is unknown to Cherie, but she is still too real because Wendy, like Cherie, is 13 and has long braided hair. Cherie is constantly on the lookout for the kidnapper's green station wagon, thinking she could be the next victim.</p> <p>Alongside this story about kidnapping, there is Cherie's relationship with Dave, the boy across the street. Now that they are 13, has their childhood friendship developed into something more mature or is it time for their friendship to end completely?</p> <p>Middle school students should easily relate to many of the books' conflicts about loss, romance, and survival.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kay Parks Haas Ottawa, KS</p>	<p><i>How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found</i>, By Sara Nickerson, Harper Collins, 2002, 281 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Mystery/Humor ISBN: 0-06-029771-9</p> <p>A few years after twelve-year-old Margaret's father dies, her mother takes her and her little sister, Sophie, to an abandoned mansion and places a 'For Sale' sign in the front yard. When her mother avoids basic questions about the house as well as her father's mysterious death, Margaret enlists the help of Boyd, a comic book-obsessed loner, to help sort through to the truth. However, she finds that family truths are always elusive and depend on who tells the story.</p> <p><i>How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found</i> blends comic book style fantasy with mystery and family drama into a surprisingly realistic story. Nickerson's unique work should become an instant classic, especially popular with young fans of Francesca Lia Block's <i>Weetzie Bat</i> series or Louis Sachar's surreal <i>Holes</i>.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Rob Linne Garden City, NY</p>
<p><i>Amy</i>, by Mary Hooper Bloomsbury, 2002, 171 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Internet Chat Rooms/Date Rape ISBN: 1-58234-793-X</p> <p>After Amy's embarrassing and very public "breakup" with her two best friends during a heated argument, she is ostracized among her peers. Lonely and depressed, she seeks new friendships and a sense of belonging in Internet chat rooms. Online, the hours melt away and Amy finds intimacy easy to establish in cyberspace.</p> <p>In one sexually charged chatroom, Amy meets "Zed," a young man who comes across as much more mature and worldly than the other boys, and he seems to really listen to her. However, when Amy sneaks away to meet Zed, the image he created of himself does not match reality. Most adolescent readers will see the trouble coming early on in the couple's online exchanges. Yet, the issues of date rape and identity in our digital age are raised with nuance, and should give young readers much to think about or discuss.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Rob Linne Garden City, NY</p>	<p><i>Red Midnight</i>, by Ben Mikaelson Harper Collins, 2002, 212pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Central America/Contemporary History ISBN: 0-380-97745-1</p> <p>When Guatemalan soldiers attack and burn his village, Santiago and his four-year-old sister, Angelina, are the only survivors. This violent scene may startle some readers, but it also introduces them to the tragedy of Guatemala during the 1980s.</p> <p>Santiago's only hope is to escape Guatemala, and his only means of doing so is his Uncle Ramos' <i>cayuco</i>, a small sailboat. From here, the novel recounts Santiago and Angelina's arduous trip from Guatemala to the US. These two children battle hunger, storms, and sickness as they sail across the Gulf of Mexico to reach the Florida coast. Initially met with anti-immigrant hostility, a poor reflection on the US policy at the time, they are eventually granted asylum and allowed to report their family's massacre.</p> <p>This story is often gripping, told in the present-tense voice of Santiago as he confronts each trial. Readers will appreciate his determination and resourcefulness in the face of great danger, although they may find the occasional heavy-handed political commentary intrusive.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Colleen M. Fairbanks Austin, TX</p>

<p><i>The Lottery</i> by Beth Goobie Orca Book, 2002, 264 pp., \$16.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Drama/Suspense ISBN: 1-55143-161-0</p> <p>Every year, an elite group of students called the Shadow Club choose a lottery “winner” from among the student body. While performing duties specified by this club, the lottery winner is subsequently shunned by the remainder of the student body in accordance with tradition. This year’s winner (or victim) is Sally Hanson, a seemingly average tenth grader whose significance to the club lies in her past.</p> <p>Beth Goobie reveals a society where fear and conformity rule the masses. This is today’s high school taken to an entirely new level. In identifying Sally’s dilemma, readers will find themselves in Sally’s shoes, questioning what they would, or would not do in her situation. In any case, the end of the story leaves readers empowered and hopeful that maybe they too could take the risk of being themselves to stand up for what is right.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Amanda Halley Carol Stream, IL</p>	<p><i>The Thief Lord</i> by Cornelia Funke Scholastic, 2002, 349 pp., \$16.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Modern Fantasy ISBN: 0-439-40437-1</p> <p>Venice is a city of beauty, mystery, and plenty of secrets. Prosper and Bo are brothers who come to Venice to escape their terrible aunt Esther. They soon join a gang of street children determined to make their own living in the shadows of everyday Venice life—with the help of each other and their mysterious leader, the Thief Lord.</p> <p>While the practice of petty crime keeps the group alive, temptation becomes unbearable when a secretive client offers the Thief Lord a burglary challenge he cannot refuse. At the same time, a hidden danger draws near. A detective, paid by Esther to hunt down Prosper and Bo, is on the brink of discovering the Thief Lord’s hideout. Yearning only for a better life, the children begin the commission that will change their lives forever, and will set the Thief Lord to his hardest trial yet.</p> <p>This novel, translated from the original German text, is full of delightful characters and creative plot line twists. Funke’s imagination touches the adventurous parts of the heart, as well as the simple human desire to belong and be loved. This story is pure magic.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Laura Schmidt Wheaton, IL</p>
<p><i>The House of Scorpion</i> by Nancy Farmer Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2002, 380 pp., \$17.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Science Fiction/ Coming of Age ISBN: 0-689-85222-3</p> <p>Looks can be deceiving. Though he has grown up in relative isolation, young Mateo Alacràn looks like a normal boy of six. Yet on the day he meets his first outsiders, he discovers he is anything but a normal boy. He is a clone.</p> <p>In a futuristic world in which clones are despised by humans and used only for medical purposes, Matt is an exception. He carries within him the DNA of the powerful drug lord El Patròn, and therefore, is treated to the finest life and education. As he grows and learns, he attempts to reconcile his love for El Patròn with the evil world the man has produced, a world in which millions of humans and animals are turned to zombies and many clones are slaughtered for their organs.</p> <p>Guided by a few friends who love and watch over him, Matt must summon the courage to flee to safety after El Patròn’s death, and the compassion to return and attempt to change the drug kingdom forever.</p> <p>Farmer presents a fresh look at the coming of age theme in her futuristic and controversial world of clones and zombies. Despite a rather hasty and almost simplistic ending to the novel, the plot is engaging, and the characters are well developed and sympathetic. High school students will connect with Matt as he grows from a frightened little boy to a young man who wrestles with difficult issues and decisions.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Erin Nita Miller Wheaton, IL</p>	<p><i>First French Kiss and Other Traumas</i> by Adam Bagdasarian Farrar Straus Giroux, 2002, 134 pp., \$16.00</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Humor/Coming of Age ISBN: 0-374-32338-0</p> <p>Growing up is both exhilarating and traumatic to Will. Born into a well-to-do household in California, Will tells stories from his adolescence that mark his life. Whether he’s trying to set a record for the longest French kiss or getting the pulp beat out of him, his life is never far from exciting.</p> <p>However, dealing with a demanding father and losing a brother to college strike notes of sadness into Will’s heart. Constantly torn between turning to his mother for comfort or being tough like his father, Will treads the scary path towards manhood. Despite the normal inconveniences of everyday living, his toughest test comes when he is forced to deal with death of someone he dearly loves.</p> <p>Will’s anecdotes are the product of his survival of adolescence. Through his stories, this protagonist’s unique voice teaches us how to love simply, trust greatly, and live freely.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Blaine Davis Wheaton, IL</p>

<p><i>Up on Cloud Nine</i> by Anne Fine Delacorte Press, 2002, 151 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Friendship/Teen Problems ISBN: 0-385-73009-8</p> <p>Stol is different. While his friend Ian is concerned with sports, Stol contemplates his life—and thinks about ending it. Although he cannot see the value of his life, he is not a bad guy: his attitude does not prevent him from manipulating a charity-sponsored raffle so that less fortunate students will benefit from it. Unfortunately, Stol's latest attempt to end his life may be successful. That is why Ian has decided to write this account of Stol's life—to remind his friend, if he wakes up, that his life is worth living.</p> <p>Are Stol's attempts at suicide a consequence of having "too-busy" parents or simply an outgrowth of his swinging emotional state? If he wakes up from the coma, will Ian be able to convince him that life really is worth its imperfections?</p> <p>This novel, challenging and engaging, allows teens to enter the life of two British teens waging a mental and physical war against a common yet often silent battle—suicide.</p> <p>Susan Swanson Wheaton, IL</p>	<p><i>Behind the Mountains</i>, Edwidge Danticat Orchard Books, 2002, 176 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Violence/Family Upheaval ISBN: 0-439-37299</p> <p>Young Celiane is presented with the best gift of all, a blank notebook, in which she decides to write down all of her feelings. Living in Haiti, Celiane, her brother Moy, and her mother, Manman, are threatened by bombs going off in Port-au-Prince during election time. Celiane writes of her mixed emotions of the uncertainty of their arrival in New York, where their father has been working to support them. As they begin their new life in New York as a family reunited, things are not as picture perfect as Celiane had imagined.</p> <p>Celiane encounters many things that confuse her emotions, including moving to a brand new country, riding in a bus that has been bombed, having a brother that moves out of the house. Celiane is able to record and sort out this spectrum of feelings by writing them in her little notebook.</p> <p>The first person narration by the author of <i>Krik? Krak!</i> will likely capture reader's hearts and emotions as Celiane's pain, sadness and triumph are shared in this interesting story.</p> <p>Kimberly Sandberg Wheaton, IL</p>
<p><i>Dolores</i> by Bruce Brooks Harper Collins, 2002, 135 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Coming of age ISBN: 0-06-027818-8</p> <p>There's just something about Dolores that draws everyone to her. Her unique personality, great sense of humor, and strong sense of identity make her a very interesting character to read about. Dolores is kidnapped, her parents get divorced, the kids at school start rumors about her, and just about every guy who lays eyes on her is so enchanted by her beauty that they all miss the real Dolores underneath. Yet through all of these things, she only grows stronger.</p> <p>Dolores' perspective encourages readers to be themselves without caring what other people think or say. The book is divided into six self-contained episodes, each one a story in itself. However, they all work together to create a picture of who Dolores really is in many different situations. Readers will feel like they truly know and love Dolores by the time they finish this engaging book.</p> <p>Janell Barnhart Wheaton, IL</p>	<p><i>A Corner of the Universe</i>, by Ann M. Martin Scholastic Press, 2002, 189 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Fiction/Mental Disabilities/Family ISBN: 0-439-388805</p> <p>Hattie Owens begins her summer vacation in the typical way: helping her parents run their boarding house and drinking lemonade on the front porch. But life changes when Adam enters their world. Adam is Hattie's 21-year-old, mentally disabled uncle; until now she has never even heard of him. The Owens' world is thrown upside down as they learn to care for and relate to Adam. Hattie's grandmother has difficulty dealing with Adam's unsophisticated ways and loud temper tantrums. Yet Hattie and Adam are instant friends, and she discovers that Adam brightens her world with his happiness. Through this relationship, Hattie must struggle with family, friendship, and what it means to be different.</p> <p>This is a beautiful tale of heartache and true friendship that challenges readers both to evaluate how they relate to those who are different, and find a way to "lift a corner of the universe" by exploring beyond their world.</p> <p>Lindsay Schwanbeck Wheaton, IL</p>

Simon Says by Elaine Marie Alphin
Harcourt, 2002, 258 pp., \$17.00

Art/Identity
ISBN: 0-15-216355

For sixteen-year-old Charles Weston, life feels like a game of Simon Says, with parents, teachers, and peers imposing their expectations on him. Determined to figure out how to be true to himself and to his art, Charles enters a boarding school for gifted artists. A painful history of rejection leads him to close himself off from everyone, hiding the powerful truth about life in his painting.

Captivated by the profundity of a fellow student's novel, Charles befriends the author. However, Charles discovers that the one he thought could show him how to escape the expectation game is really the best player of all.

Capturing the inner reality of the artist, *Simon Says* wrestles with intense themes of identity, homosexuality, and suicide. High school students will find Charles' journey to self-expression thought provoking as he learns to connect with others, and to remain true to himself, regardless of others' expectations.

Sarah Gartland
Wheaton, IL

Hoop City by Scott Blumenthal and Brett Hodus
Scobre Press Publication, 2002, 138 pp., \$9.95

Inspirational/Basketball
ISBN: 0-9708992-1-1

Tony had it all figured out. Soon he and his brother Mike would be headed to college. They would finally be rid of the hopelessness that surrounded them. The Hope brothers were finally going to get their chance to be somebody, their chance to make something of themselves, a chance to fulfill their dreams together, the dream to play hoops in the NBA. Tony had the plan, everything was going perfectly. Tomorrow all their problems would go away, but tomorrow never came. As tragedy rocks the world of the Hope brothers, Tony has to make a difficult choice. Does he continue to go after his dreams even if it means his brother will not be with him? Does he continue on with his life while leaving his brother behind? It will take courage and strength for both brothers to rise above and to make their dreams a reality.

Davona Reynolds
West Chicago, IL

The Frog Princess by E.D. Baker
Bloomsbury, 2002, 200 pp., \$15.95

Fairy Tales/Fantasy
ISBN: 1-58234-799-9

Uninterested in marrying Prince Jorge, Princess Emeraldal (Emma) escapes to a nearby swamp and encounters Eadric, a prince-turned-frog. Emeraldal kisses him to reverse the spell; however, the kiss backfires and Emeraldal becomes a green-skinned frog.

Emma and Eadric take a harrowing journey to break the spell. They are kidnapped by an incompetent, evil witch named Vannabe, but rescued by Li'l, the bat. Li'l and Fang, their new snake friend, escort them to Emeraldal's castle, where Emeraldal's Aunt Grassina aides them in recovering Emeraldal's lost bracelet, a key in breaking the spell.

Baker has added a twist to a popular Grimms tale; however, the story begins slow and characters are colorless. The plot could be tighter—Emma and Eadric's encounter with a nymph seems insignificant. Nonetheless, the story features crisp dialogue and is peppered with comedy. While the happy-ever-after ending is predictable, Emma and Eadric become friends, not lovers. The story will appeal primarily to young girls.

Pam B. Cole
Kennesaw, GA

The Named by Marianne Curley
Bloomsbury, 2002, 333 pp., \$16.95

Fantasy
ISBN: 1-58234-779-4

Ethan and Isabel are different from their high school classmates because of their special skills. As members of *The Named*, they travel through time to help fight evil provoked by the *Order of Chaos* that strives to change events in history. The dangers and conflicts that they face are told in alternating chapters from their different points of view.

In their travels they fight Chaos in historical events, including those in King Richard II's England, in America in 1759, and in Athens, 2000 B.C.. Love, adventure, time travel, and young independent characters with unusual skills make this book a winner for young readers. This novel is the first in a trilogy, and will appeal to middle grades and secondary readers of both sexes who interested in science fiction and fantasy.

Freya J. Zipperer
Savannah, GA

Special thanks for Steven Layne for having his students at Wheaton College, in Wheaton, IL, read and review books for this and a forthcoming issue of *The ALAN Review*!